

Recording and recognising the experiences of estranged students in higher education

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Recording and recognising

Background and purpose

Recruiting participants

Project participation

Photo elicitation

Findings

Conclusions and recommendations

What happened next?

References



Background and purpose

Job role

Stand Alone

Wannabe sociologist

Opportunity

Challenge stigma and taboo

Raise awareness

Contribute to institutional knowledge and help shape support

Photo elicitation

Taking and using photographs as the basis for focus group interviews with the participants

Provide structure to the interview, produce richer data and help create a better balance in power dynamics (Bates et al., 2017)



Recruiting Participants

One institution

Email to entire student body

Used the term 'estranged'

Asked for volunteers

Participants self-selecting

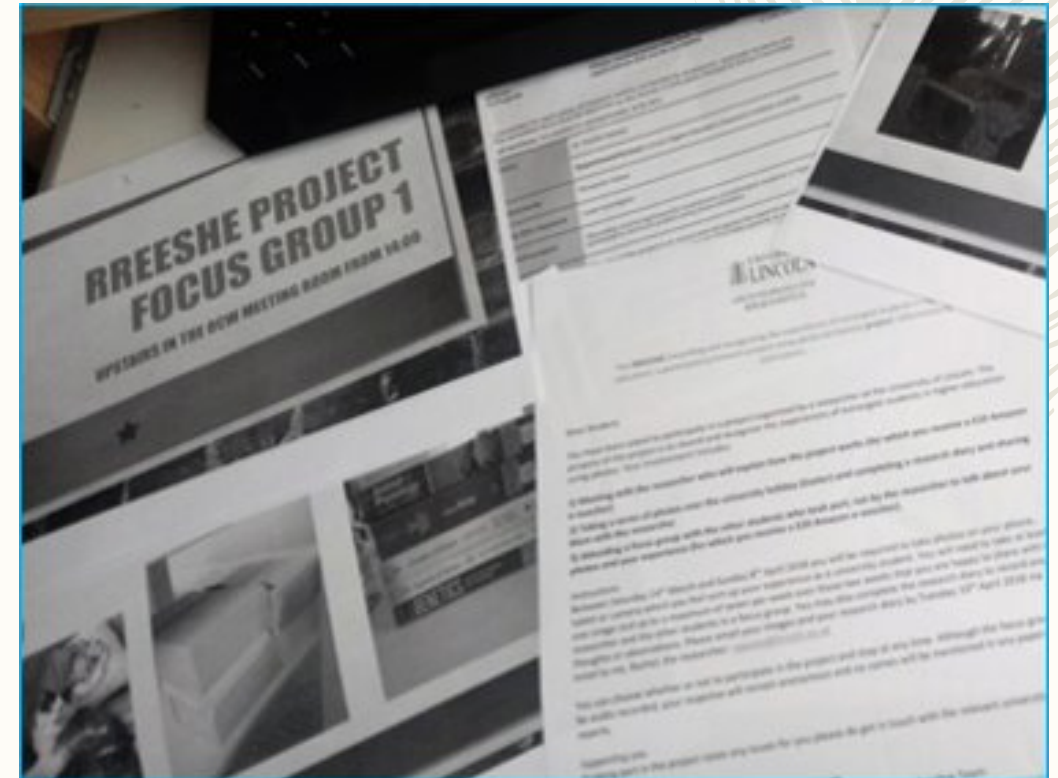
Financial incentive



Image from: <http://enjoyphone.blogspot.com/dd text>

Project participation #1

Individual one-to-one meetings
Eight students took part
Semi-structured interview schedule
Shared images on paper handouts
Two focus groups and an interview
Anonymity





Findings: Recording estrangement

Students took 49 images in total

“Visual inventories of objects, people and artefacts” and the *“intimate dimensions of the social”* (Harper 2002, p.13).

Images depicting the institutional experience of university e.g. buildings on campus

Images of the social e.g. friends, pets and 'selfies'

Recognising estrangement

This is probably the first
instance that I've heard of
estrangement being
mentioned by the university
which is sort of heartening
for me [S8]



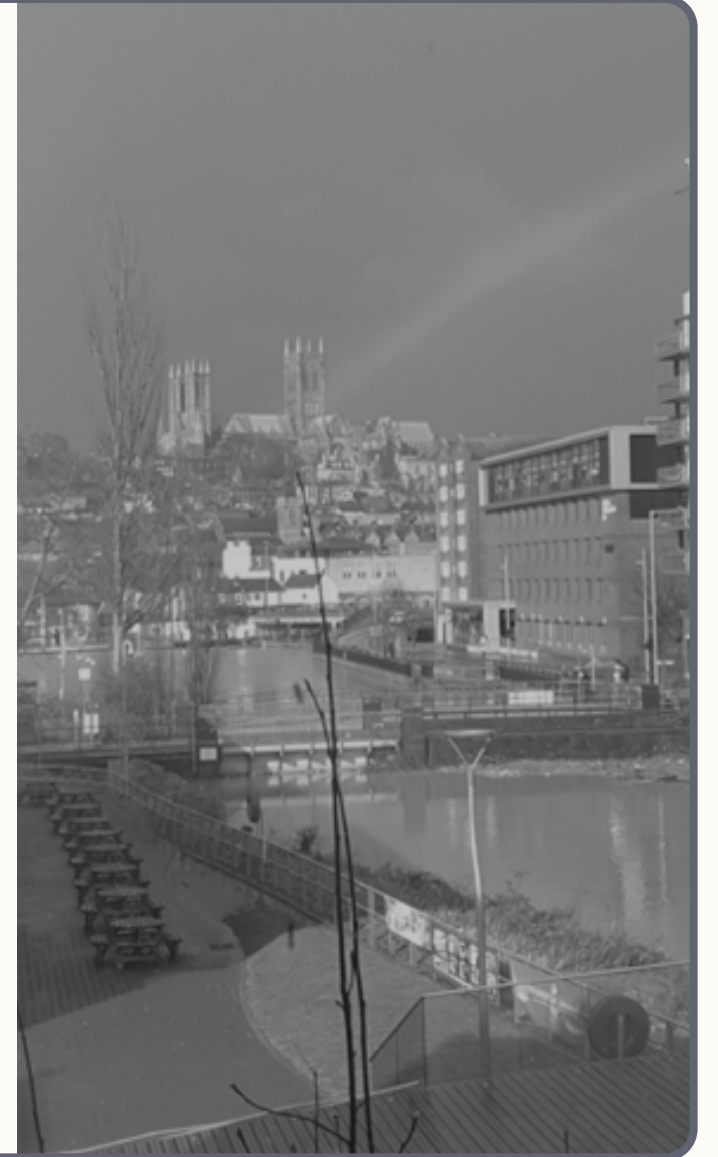
University vacations

I felt really good. To get away from the university was actually really nice... I went to London, I've never done that before, go to London [S2]



Finance

Student finance came in after my deposit was due, for example, so that was a really hard time, because there was that gap where obviously I was quite reliant on finding funds myself [S5]



Accommodation

On the first day the parents of my flatmates would ask me where my parents were so they could meet them... And I was like 'Erm'. You're almost pushed straightaway to be like 'They're not here' [S6]



Wellbeing

I felt kind of isolated
as well to be honest
[S3]



Support

It made me appreciate a lot more what I have regarding friends... they're not my blood family, but they are kind of like my family and it just makes me so happy to have them in my life, that I can fall back on [S2]





Project participation #2

Difficult

Reflection

Therapeutic

Reassuring

So it was nice knowing, as somebody said they'd got the email from you, there must be other people then in the same situation... Because like you said, it's nice to know that people are in the same position and, like, they deal with the same kind of things. So it's not like I'm on my own against this sort of thing [S6]

Conclusions and Recommendations

Complexity of family and familial estrangement

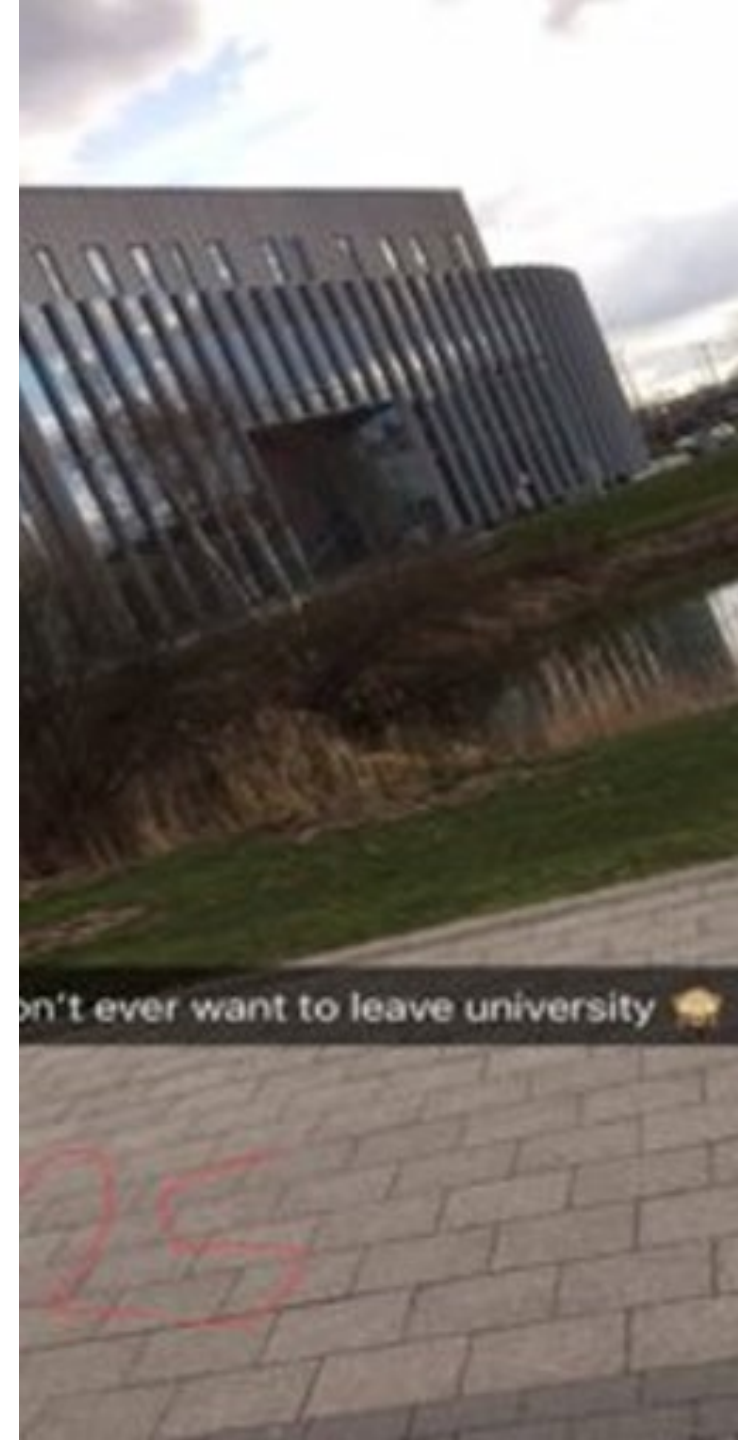
Risk for the researcher and the researched

Challenging assumptions about 'what students do' during vacations

Personal strength and resistances (Taylor and Costa, 2019)

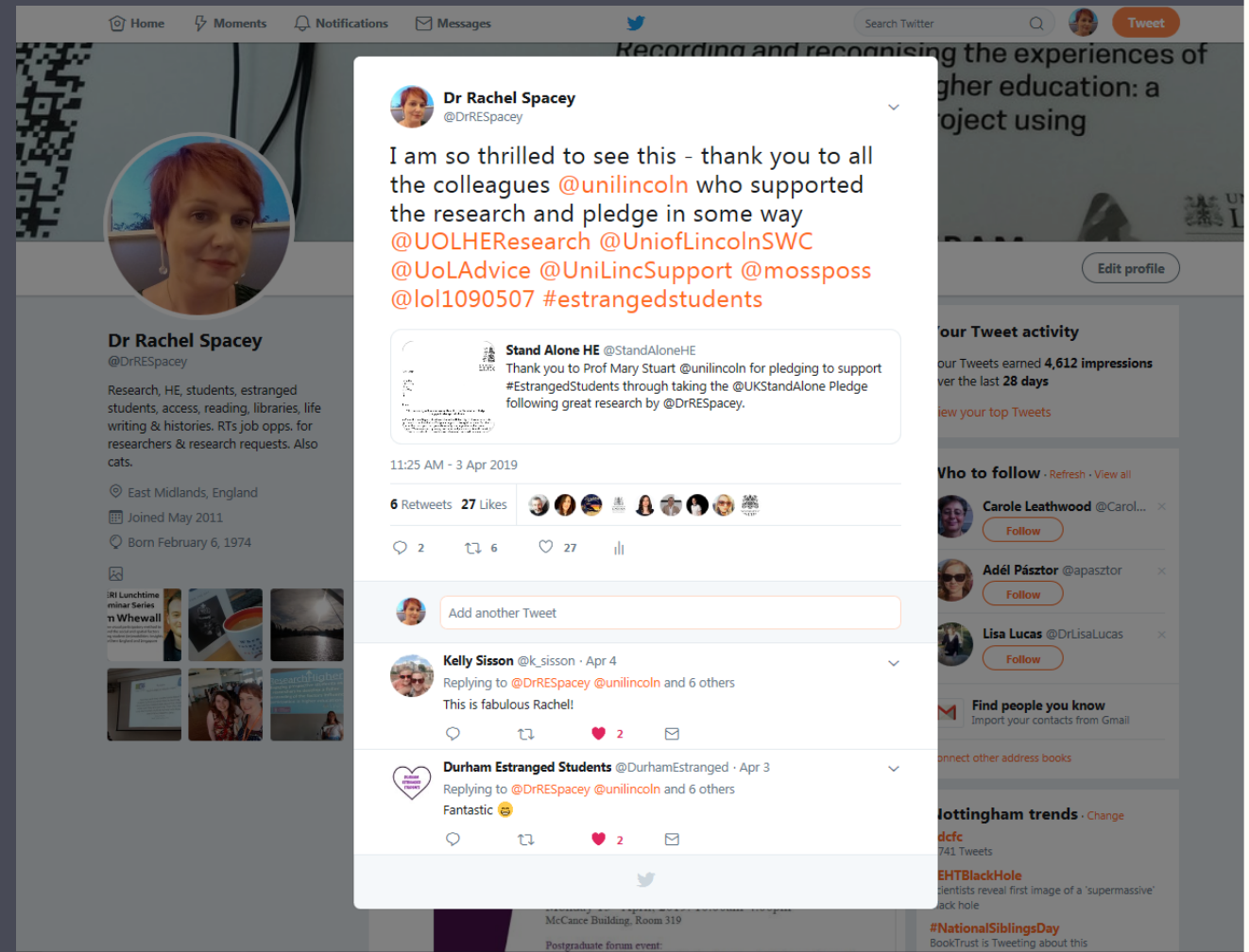
Acknowledgement from the university

Opportunity to access tailored support



One year later...

Life writing online
research: Incn.ac/9s





Acknowledgements

*It is so powerful to stop and listen to the voices of
estranged students themselves*

[Becca Bland, CEO of Stand Alone, 2016]

Thank you to the eight estranged students who let
me listen to their voices.

References

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